

## “CHOSE LOVE NOT IN THE SHALLOWS BUT THE DEEP”: LYRICS OF CHRISTINA ROSSETTI AND THE OXFORD MOVEMENT

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**Abstract.** *The Victorian age and the Oxford Movement reveal the close connection between aesthetics and theology that is tightly related to the Romanticism of Scott, Coleridge and Wordsworth. Like the Pre-Raphaelites, the Tractarians asserted that the natural and supernatural formed a dialectic unity. Poetry and religion, which were two cornerstones of Christina Rossetti's life, met both in her poetry and in Tractarian "aesthetic religion". In Rossetti's late verse, Pre-Raphaelite and Tractarian poetics are seen not as alternative components, but as complimentary ones fulfilling John Henry Newman's idea that lyrics is a poetry of "contemplation", not "communication". The idea of showing "real things unseen" (Keble, Newman) is not only one of the most important "techniques" in Rossetti's poetics and in the implementation of the Tractarian principles of Reserve and Analogy, but also a vivid example of mutual penetration of Pre-Raphaelite naturalism and Tractarian incarnationism.*

*It is precisely in the treatment of nature in Rossetti's verse where the correlation of Pre-Raphaelitism and Tractarianism becomes most evident – from narrative poems to lyrics, and from fantasy to devotional poems. The poem clearly shows the result of the interpenetration of Pre-Raphaelite and Tractarian discourses within the boundaries of one text. The "eyes of body" from Rossetti's early poems ("Goblin Market") give way to*

“eyes of soul” (“An Old World Thicket”, “Later Life”). It also determines the nature of mysticism in her poetry, with a transformation of seen, definite, materialistic sensuality via Analogy and Reserve into the spiritual and mystical. In this way, the evolution of the lyrical persona of her poetry from the aesthetic to the teleological, from the Pre-Raphaelite pictorial paradigm to Tractarian mysticism, and from the phenomenal to the noumenal can be seen.

**Keywords:** Oxford Movement, principles of Reserve and Analogy, John Keble, John Henry Newman, Tractarian aesthetic theory, Pre-Raphaelite movement, aestheticism, incarnationism

## Introduction

Christina Rossetti's position in the middle of the Pre-Raphaelite Movement and her long 40 years of creative work make her one of the outstanding figures in the history of English poetry of the time. Swinburne had every reason for calling her the “Jael who led [the Pre-Raphaelite] hosts to Victory”:<sup>1</sup> she was the first Pre-Raphaelite poet whose verses were published in all four issues of “The Germ” since 1850, and the success of her collection “Goblin Market And Other Poems” in 1862 was the first great success among the group. And she stands by herself because her deep faith distinguishes her from Dante Gabriel's agnosticism or Swinburne's atheism, binding together Pre-Raphaelitism and Tractarianism.

There are direct biographical factors that connect Christina Rossetti and the Oxford Movement. In 1843, the Rossetti family began to attend Christ Church in Albany Street. Under the charismatic and eloquent Reverend William Dodsworth, Pusey's consistent disciple, and with Cardinal Manning and Edward Pusey often preaching, Christ Church became one of the main centres for the dissemination of Tractarian ideas.<sup>2</sup> For Christina, who was 13 years old at the time, her life became closely connected with the ideas of the Oxford movement from then on. This connection was complex and partly self-contradictory. Rossetti wrote a lot of devotional poetry of various kinds: the Church year poems (“Some Feasts and Fasts”, comprising 68 poems in the vein of Keble), prayer-inspired poems (“Praying Always”), lyrics with Bible allusions (“Balm in Gilead”), and poetry on holy places (“God's Acre”) and church rituals (“Sursum Corda”). Her poem “In the Bleak Midwinter” is one of the most popular hymns in England.

Some critics (such as Raymond Chapman<sup>3</sup> and George B. Tennyson) consider Christina Rossetti “directly and fully a product of the Oxford Movement” and “the true inheritor of the Tractarian devotional mode in poetry”, the second in the row ever (Hopkins, Rossetti, Patmore, and Thompson).<sup>4</sup> But though the devotional aspect is essential, it only forms one part of the themes among nearly 500 pages of Rossetti's poetry – so it is important to trace the Tractarian influence on her Pre-Raphaelite verse

1 Stevenson L. *The Pre-Raphaelite Poets*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973, p. 107.

2 For more details, see: Marsh J. *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography*. Lnd.: Pimlico, 1995, pp. 55-64.

3 Chapman, Raymond. *Faith and Revolt: Studies in the Literary Influence of the Oxford Movement*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970.

4 Tennyson G.B. *Victorian devotional poetry: The Tractarian mode*. Cambridge (Mass.); Lnd.: Harvard University Press, 1981, pp. 197-198.

"to understand some previously underemphasised connections between Pre-Raphaelite and Tractarian aesthetics".<sup>5</sup> We share Antony Harrison's views of Christina Rossetti as "the poet who, in the pervasive Tractarian tendencies of her poetry, remained true to the topoi, the habits of mind, and the ostensibly sacramental aesthetics of first-generation Pre-Raphaelitism", and of "her poetry as simultaneously Pre-Raphaelite and Tractarian".<sup>6</sup> A convincing example of this important connection is given in Mary Arseneau's research "by considering the influence that Tractarian habits of thought had on Rossetti's conceptions of symbolism and interpretation, and by demonstrating how the Rossetti's understanding of symbolism sheds important light on 'Goblin Market'".<sup>7</sup> It is precisely in the treatment of nature in Christina Rossetti's verse where the correlation of Pre-Raphaelitism and Tractarianism becomes most evident – from narrative poems to lyrics, and from fantasy to devotional poems.

## 1. The "Aesthetic Religion" of the Oxford Movement

The Oxford (Tractarian) Movement, associated with the names of John Keble (1792-1866), John Henry Newman (1801-1890), Isaac Williams (1802-1865), Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800-1882) and others, dates from Keble's Assize Sermon in Oxford on 14 July 1833 and lasted for only 12 years, until 1845. In its pre-Tractarian and Tractarian years, the Movement was directed towards the revival of "High Church" of the 17th century, dealing with apostolicity, holiness and other specific theological matters, but it gradually took on special significance with regard to the spiritual life of Victorian England, going beyond the scope of religious discussions. "Religious humanism" and the "open theology" of Newman were in part an attempt to adjust religion to the needs of civilisation and culture.<sup>8</sup> Not all of the 90 "Tracts for the Times" (1833–1841) dealt with theological issues. Some, such as the literary essays of Keble and Newman, Keble's Oxford lectures on poetry ("Praellectiones Academicæ", 1831-1841) and their original verse enable the researcher to consider Tractarian poetics as an integral system: "aesthetics and theology do not in the nineteenth century grow in alien soils; they are branches of the same tree."<sup>9</sup> It is therefore important to single out their common ideological and aesthetic themes.

First of all, there are deep and manifold connections (including dialogue and polemics) with the "Great Romanticism" of the early 19th century. Summarising the general opinion of most researchers, George Tennyson noted: "It is a commonplace of writings on the Oxford Movement that Tractarianism was in some important way a product of Romanticism, even it was also a product of renewed reverence for antiquity,

5 Harrison A. *Christina Rossetti in Context*. University of North Carolina Press, 1988, pp. 67-68.

6 Ibid.

7 Arseneau M. *Incarnation and Interpretation: Christina Rossetti, the Oxford Movement, and "Goblin Market"*. // *Victorian Poetry*. Vol. 31, No. 1 (Spring, 1993), West Virginia UP, pp. 79-93 online: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40002453>

8 Golovin V. *O tvorcheskom metode Waltera Patera-istorika iskusstva* [Golovin V. On the creative method of Walter Pater, an art historian] *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta, serija 22:istoria*. 1986. № 3, p. 74.

9 Tennyson G.B. *Victorian devotional poetry: The Tractarian mode*. Cambridge (Mass.); Lnd.: Harvard University Press, 1981, p. 61.

apostolicity, and the particular Anglican spirituality associated with High Church tradition of the seventeenth-century divines.”<sup>10</sup>

In reference to prominent personalities in this area, Newman (in “*Apologia pro Vita Sua*”) firstly names poets (Scott, Coleridge, Southey and Wordsworth) and, only after that, two clergymen (A. Knox and T. Sikes).<sup>11</sup> In acknowledging Coleridge’s ideas, Newman and Keble nevertheless rejected his later “heretical” views, while Wordsworth was for them a Tractarian per se who took nature as a live, active, organic whole, filled with divine meaning and inseparably connecting man with nature.<sup>12</sup> “It was, in short, the spirit of Romanticism at work with Church.”<sup>13</sup>

Newman’s ideas on the correlation between religion and poetry were stated in his essay “Poetry, with Reference to Aristotle’s Poetics” (1829). His approach here was Neo-Platonistic and Coleridgean, with a deep impact from the theory of Keble and Victorian ideas on art – so key links of art and the moral, the poet’s personality and the value of their art can be viewed as common both for Tractarian aesthetics and Victorian poetics. Reading the poetry of Christina Rossetti in the light of Tractarian ideas, it is important to recall Newman’s statement that the character of lyrical poetry is that of contemplation rather than communication. Tennyson notes that “the hallmark of Keble’s poetics are the high conception of poetry as something akin to or part of religion, and the view of the poet as unburdening himself of profoundly religious impulses by exercising the imagination”.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, the dedication of Keble’s “Lectures on Poetry” to Wordsworth as a “true philosopher and inspired poet” demonstrates the special attention that the Tractarians paid to nature poetry. The importance of this kind of poetry in their theory (and poetic practice, such as in Keble’s “The Christian Year” and the poetry of Newman and A. Williams) is in its double piety: the first impulse to write it is pious, while its subject also carries the mark of God and is revealed in analogy. Meanwhile, Keble considered that nature itself is not only an appropriate subject for poetry but particularly applicable in an age “weak in faith” when God should be perceived mediately, via analogy, rather than direct statement (as it was in the times of Judea or the Middle Ages).

The aesthetic principles of the Tractarian movement were formed long before the beginning of the movement itself, but its two basic principles, connecting natural and supernatural – the doctrines of Reserve and Analogy – were formulated in Isaac Williams’s Tracts 80 and 87 and Keble’s Tract 89.

The Tractarian principle of Reserve is closely connected with the earlier theological concept of Economy (Clement, Origen, Joseph Butler) and can be seen, for example, in church practice with regard to the different meaning of mass for neophytes and believers. Since God could not be fully perceived, His truth is hidden and accessible only to the extent that a person could understand it, and God in his economy reveals this gradually as

10 Tennyson G.B., supra note 9, p.14.

11 Newman, John Henry (Cardinal). *Apologia pro Vita Sua* online: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/19690/19690-h/19690-h.htm#p4>

12 Prickett S. *Romanticism and Religion*. Cambridge, 1976, p. 104.

13 Tennyson G.B. *Victorian devotional poetry: The Tractarian mode*. Cambridge (Mass.); Lnd.: Harvard University Press, 1981, p. 15.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

a man gets more mature – "reserving", "keeping", "restricting" something for the future. The subject is so sacred and complex that it can never be exhausted but can be grasped, beginning "from the shallows" – this is one of the messages of Christina Rossetti's sonnet on John Newman's death (1890): "*Chose love not in the shallows but the deep*". The object world created by God and Christian love is so immense that comprehension of it might first touch its "layers", being directed towards its profundity. This is also true with regard to the inexhaustible sense of a believer's eternal life ("Later Life" sonnets).

The second basic Tractarian principle is that of Analogy, under which God conceals His catholicity and the diversity of the world He created. The two principles are closely linked, as "Analogy is God's way of practicing Reserve".<sup>15</sup> For understanding Christina Rossetti's late poetry, the most important concept lies in Newman's idea that "material phenomena are both the types and the instruments of real things unseen" – that is, of God's presence.<sup>16</sup> Here can be found a correlation between Rossetti's Pre-Raphaelite naturalism and the deep faith realised in her verse. From another perspective, the concept of Analogy is closely connected with mysticism – or using the visible things in terms of the slightest ("Pre-Raphaelite") details of the material world in its correlation with moral aspects or faith symbols. Keble's Tract # 89 refers to "not a merely *poetical* or a merely *moral*, but a *mystical* use of things visible".<sup>17</sup> The triad "poetic – moral – mystic" is a means of dealing with the phenomena of the material world in an associative, allegorical or symbolic mode: "the way of regarding external things either as fraught with imaginative associations, or as parabolical lessons of conduct, or as a symbolic language in which God speaks to us of a world out of sight."<sup>18</sup>

It is interesting to see principles of Analogy and Reserve taken together and expressed openly in Rossetti's "*Sing-Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book*" (1872): "*What are heavy? sea-sand and sorrow:/ What are brief? today and tomorrow:/ What are frail? spring blossoms and youth:/ What are deep? the ocean and truth.*"<sup>19</sup> But although such a literal formula is effective for children's verse, as in the neophyte's mass, the interconnection between Pre-Raphaelite and Tractarian concepts is more complex and manifold. Like the Pre-Raphaelites, the Tractarians were interested in the problem of interaction of arts and literature. In his Lectures, Keble, giving preference to poetry, calls music its sister, followed by architecture, sculpture and painting (in descending order). Differentiation between primary (Homer, Aeschylus, Pindar, Dante, Spenser, Shakespeare and others) and secondary (Sophocles, Milton, Dryden, Burns, Byron, Shelley and others) poets not only has much in common with differentiation between

15 Tennyson G.B. *Victorian devotional poetry: The Tractarian mode*. Cambridge (Mass.); Lnd.: Harvard University Press, 1981, p. 47.

16 This can be compared with Keble's definition of the "poetic" as "a tendency to make the things we see represent the things we do not see, to invent or remark mutual associations between them, to call the one sort by the names of the other" (Keble, John. *Tracts for the Times: On the Mysticism Attributed to the Fathers of the Church* [Number 89] online <http://anglicanhistory.org/tracts/tract89/section6.html>).

17 Keble, John. *Tracts for the Times: On the Mysticism Attributed to the Fathers of the Church* [Number 89] online <http://anglicanhistory.org/tracts/tract89/section6.html>.

18 *Ibid.*

19 Rossetti, Christina: *The Complete Poems*. Lnd.: Penguin Books, 2001, p. 234.

“imagination” and “fancy” (Coleridge) and affirms powerful religious feeling as a criterion for recognition, but also (in the case of Dante and Shakespeare) shows a close affinity with the list of Pre-Raphaelite favourites. In the aim of “bridging together the world of fact and the world of transcendent values”,<sup>20</sup> the Pre-Raphaelites cannot but address fantastic and legendary plots, following in the steps of the Great Romantics. But it is here that tradition shows a striking difference in the poetics of the Romanticism of the late 19th century. As science facts prove abstract ideas, so the most fantastic and supernatural are detailed and described. While Coleridge can say about Geraldine in “Christabel”, “a sight to dream of, not to tell”, without providing any further picture, Rossetti describes the appearance, gait, speech and movements of every one of the six goblins. While Turner’s painting “The Burning of the Houses of Parliament” (1835) is a huge shapeless yellow and gold blur, and the building itself is barely discernible, the Pre-Raphaelite John Everett Millais (“Christ in the House of His Parents”, 1849) shows Joseph’s dirty nails and his Jesus, as an indignant Charles Dickens notes, is “a hideous, wry-necked, blubbering, red-headed boy, in a bed-gown” (“Old Lamps for New Ones”).<sup>21</sup> We can add that the “red-headed” Jesus has meticulously drawn whitish eyelashes, red eyebrows, milky skin and freckles, and seams and gathers are clearly visible in his bed gown. On the one hand, this undoubtedly represents a return to the traditions of the Quattrocento, with its “persistent empirics” and “pathos of analytical studies of nature in all its details”.<sup>22</sup> On the other, it reflects the mystics of an era of extremely popular spiritualism, when it was not enough to know that life existed after death (for example, the famous, not specified, just named Life-in-Death in Coleridge’s “The Ancient Mariner”), but to prove its existence in a kind of “positive knowledge simulation” through “clear” material signs, such as voices and the movement of objects.

So, in the “first wave” of Pre-Raphaelitism, both in poetry and painting, a preoccupation with careful details of a visible sensual world serves visionary purposes – ultimately representing the unseen and sacred, materialising the spiritual and spiritualising the material. And this is fully characteristic of Christina Rossetti’s poetry.

## 2. The Religious Aesthetics of Christina Rossetti’s Late Poetry

Different phases can be clearly identified in the representation of nature in Christina Rossetti’s verse. The first of these is the Pre-Raphaelite approach to dealing with natural phenomena by thoroughly and scrupulously describing the tiniest details of flora and fauna. These are not present in an allegorical or mystical sense, but are simply seen “populating” her narrative poems as they are in the foreground of Pre-Raphaelite paintings.

Second are the so-called “landscapes of soul”, wherein natural descriptions represent the sublimation of a clear psychological state of the persona (for example, “The First Spring

20 Thomas E.W. *Christina Georgina Rossetti*. N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1931, p. 7.

21 Dickens, Charles. *Old Lamps for New Ones* online: <http://www.djo.org.uk/indexes/articles/old-lamps-for-new-ones.html>.

22 Rotenberg E. *Iskusstvo Italii 16-17 vekov* [Rotenberg E. Italian Art of the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries]. M.: Sov. khudozhnik, 1989, p. 24.

Day"). In a similar way to the verse of the English Romantic poets (such as Wordsworth), these poems nevertheless retain the typical traits of the Pre-Raphaelite exactness of detail and inclination towards multiple and separate images. However, they are not expanded into major metaphors, as in the poetry of the Great Romantics.

It is important to understand how the relationship between Christina Rossetti's persona and nature changed. The poem "An Old-World Thicket"<sup>23</sup> ("A Pageant and Other Poems", 1881) is a vivid example of this change in her nature poetry within the framework of a single text. The change from the aesthetic to the teleological, and the evolution from Pre-Raphaelite to Tractarian comprehension is the poem's main conflict.

The epigraph "Una selva oscura" from Dante's "La Commedia", although brief, is synonymic with the title "An Old-World Thicket". It makes the reader recall the fragment and tunes into something deeper than a mere nature poem. Rossetti's "dark wood" gains a distinct complexion from the very beginning, with the first two stanzas containing the names of nine types of tree enclosed in stylistically and emotionally neutral anaphoric constructions. The birds, in contrast, are not "ornithologically" specified, but poetically, with the help of synaesthesia: "*Such birds they seemed as challenged each desire;/ Like spots of azure heaven upon the wing;/ Like downy emeralds that alight and sing;/ Like actual coals on fire;/ Like anything they seemed, and everything.//*" Like the goblins in "Goblin Market", the birds here exist in their particular world, and are thoroughly, meticulously and expressively depicted with Pre-Raphaelite precision: flowers and coral-coloured or golden berries are their food, and honeydew their drink, with their feathers "*lit by sparkling eyes*". The two stanzas after this line describe the background to the birds' feast, with shadows dancing in the sun and the sounds of water spreading coolness and nurturing all flesh. This world is not just gorgeous in its beauty, but also wise: "*They seemed to speak more wisdom than we speak,/ To make our music flat/ And all our subtlest reasonings wild or weak.//*" The persona records and describes the details automatically, seeing neither sun ("*unseen sun*") nor water ("*It seemed not here or there, but everywhere*") – like the poisoned Laura doesn't see the colourful goblin world.

But if in "Goblin Market", the loss of ability to apprehend the magical and fantastic is the issue at hand, "An Old-World Thicket" deals with destruction and loss of connection with the outside world itself – with this destruction is perceived as her internal loss. The description of the persona's state is provided with a type of psychological ruthlessness characteristic of Rossetti, sharply contrasting with the peaceful description of nature in the preceding seven stanzas. This reflects the heroine's "inner war", revealed with the aid of the gradation of syntactic parallelisms and intensified through repetition, alliteration and a lack of tropes: "*Each sore defeat of my defeated life/ Faced and outfaced me in that bitter hour;/ And turned to yearning palsy all my power,/ And all my peace to strife,/ Self stabbing self with keen lack-pity knife.//*"

The ruthlessness of this inner struggle (expressed at the level of the rhythm, metre and images – *lack-pity knife*) is harnessed to reveal contrasts and conflict, which are expressed directly below in the text: "*Sweetness of beauty moved me to despair;/ Stung me to anger by its mere content...*" Whether in a state of dreaming or wakefulness, the

23 Rossetti, Christina: *The Complete Poems*. Lnd.: Penguin Books, 2001, pp. 331-336.



persona feels the change: the birds stop calling to one another; the wind drops, but the sound of water becomes more audible; all the springs start gushing; the sound of a great waterfall is heard somewhere; and it ends with a thunderclap as a climax. This is an evident manifestation of the new facets of the persona's "inner landscape", with the description of her spiritual change via this "*universal sound of lamentation*", and represents a cleansing ("*scouring*") of a previously important obsession with nature's magical and overwhelming beauty. It is a radical change, signifying a rebellion against her previous artistic views and a compromise with her deep faith and personal involvement in the development of the Pre-Raphaelite model. Here, the form taken by this radical transformation is clearly shown and becomes the poem's climax: "*My heart then rose a rebel against light,/ Scouring all earth and heaven and depth and height,/ Ingathering wrath and gloom,/ Ingathering wrath to wrath and night to night.//*"; "*The eyes, I mean, of my rebellious soul,/ For still my bodily eyes were closed and dark...*"

From that point on, the poem's intonation becomes essentially different, with the appearance of many rhetorical questions and biblical allusions. The poet looks at the same things as before, but sees something different. The trees are not specific and various types any more, but "*the wood, and every creature of the wood*". Each drop of water, branch or leaf appears here neither as a unique natural phenomenon nor a fact of the world's inimitable beauty seen by the poet's eyes, but solely as an object in which the sunset might be reflected. Every bird is not depicted as at the start of the poem, but just named according to the role it is assigned: "*mother-bird*", "*mate-bird*", "*unfledged nestling*". And all of these are significant insofar as they "*displayed a gilded moss or beak or breast*" – that is, became one of the sunset's manifestations. To be fit for their "mission" (both teleological and poetical), the sun and the moon appear unified and standardised before the reader ("*his great splendour*"; "*luminous coldness*"). But the magnificent and symbolic sunset makes itself the best, lighting up a roaming flock led by "*a patriarchal ram*". Even the sound of the "*tinkling bell*" on the ram's neck does not seem "*flat*" any more, as she is not interested in harmony or discord as they are, but in the destination and purpose. This seems a clear realisation of Coleridge's notion (which the Tractarians also shared): "... *for that man is indeed a slave, who is a slave to his own senses, and whose mind and imagination cannot carry him beyond the distance which his hand can touch, or even his eye can reach*" ("Poetry and Religion").<sup>24</sup> Rossetti's persona frees herself of this "slavery". Such a victory is also celebrated by John Newman in his poem "The Pillar of the Cloud" (written in 1833 and later becoming a famous hymn, "Lead, Kindly Light"): "*I was not ever thus, nor pray'd that Thou/ Should lead me on./ I lov'd to choose and see my path; but now/ Lead Thou me on!*".

"An Old-World Thicket" is included in Christina Rossetti's last lifetime collection of secular lyrics, and throws additional light on the "thicket" that both persona and the poet were leaving. The poem clearly shows the result of the interpenetration of the Pre-Raphaelite and Tractarian discourses within the boundaries of a single text.

The process of submission of the Pre-Raphaelite relationship to nature to that of the Tractarian can be seen in all the poems in her last lifetime book, "Verses" (1894).

24 The Portable Coleridge. Edited, and with Introduction, by I.A. Richards. N.Y.: Penguin Books, 1977, p. 396.



It opens with the sonnet cycle "Out of the Deep Have I Called unto Thee, O Lord", in which this change is directly stated: "Alone Lord God, in Whom our trust and peace,/ Our love and our desire, glow bright with hope;/ Lift us above this transitory scope/ Of earth, these pleasures that begin and cease,/ This moon which wanes, these seasons which decrease:/ We turn to Thee; as on an eastern slope/ Wheat feels the dawn beneath night's lingering cope,/ Bending and stretching sunward ere it sees./"<sup>25</sup> From here onwards, Rossetti is interested in the seasons as events in the ecclesiastical calendar and natural phenomena only as symbols, comprising God's manifestations.

Here, we can also find the cycle "Later Life: A Double Sonnet of Sonnets",<sup>26</sup> which can be considered the poet's spiritual autobiography. This calls to mind John Donne's "Holy Sonnets", "with their alternation between despair, self-laceration and faithful hope".<sup>27</sup> Rossetti acknowledges all her regrets and disillusionment, and ponders over death. The "later life" of the title is thus life after death – that life which is promised to a believer in Christ, and awareness of the confidence in this promise penetrates Rossetti's lyrics of faith. The 28th and final sonnet in the cycle shows how different the correlation between the world of the living and the world of the dead is in her late poetry compared with the Pre-Raphaelites. This is undoubtedly connected with her deep faith: "In life our absent friend is far away:/ But death may bring our friend exceeding near,/ Show him familiar faces long so dear/ And lead him back in reach of words we say./ He only cannot utter yea or nay/ In any voice accustomed to our ear;/ He only cannot make his face appear/ And turn the sun back on our shadowed day./ The dead may be around us, dear and dead;/ The unforgotten dearest dead may be/ Watching us with unslumbering eyes and heart/ Brimful of words which cannot yet be said,/ Brimful of knowledge they may not impart,/ Brimful of love for you and love for me./"<sup>28</sup>

This sonnet doesn't depict life after death; the theme is psychological, with Christina Rossetti depicting the "life" of the dead for the living. Compared to "The Blessed Damozel" (1849) by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the sonnet shows both the complete lack of any systematic picture of "being" after death (which is the basis of Dante Gabriel's poem),<sup>29</sup> and the complete awareness of its existence for the living. The latter is achieved not only at the expense of the absence of any details and descriptions in the sonnet (the only exception is "unslumbering eyes and heart"), which are plentiful in "The Blessed Damozel", but also mainly at the expense of "negative" descriptions – a sort of anti-description that stands not for the outward, but for the inward and the soul's "being". The loneliness of a loving soul in life (*our absent friend is far away; the unforgotten dearest dead*) is mutually complementary with the loneliness of another soul after death, which is tortured (and is stylistically fixed with the anaphoric "brimful") to know and not tell, to see and be invisible, to hear and not be heard, to love and not "practice" love.

25 Rossetti, Christina: *The Complete Poems*. Lnd.: Penguin Books, 2001, p. 389.

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 346-358.

27 Marsh J. *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography*. Lnd.: Pimlico, 1995, p. 483.

28 Rossetti, Christina: *The Complete Poems*. Lnd.: Penguin Books, 2001, p. 358.

29 For a detailed analysis, see: Chernokova Y.S. *Poezia Kristiny Rossetti v kontekste estetiki preraphaelitizma* [Chernokova Y.S. The Poetry of Christina Rossetti in the Context of Pre-Raphaelite Aesthetics]. Kharkov, Krok, 2004, pp. 59-65.

Jerome McGann objects to the idea stated above on the complete association of Christina Rossetti with the Tractarian Movement. He considers that “Rossetti’s evangelical sympathies kept her Protestantism resolute” and that the concept of psychopannychism is “the single most important enabling principle in Rossetti’s religious poetry”, when speaking of the “paradisaal visions” set forth by this concept of Soul Sleep.<sup>30</sup> The poem “The Convent Threshold” (“Goblin Market”, 1858), the favourite of G. M. Hopkins, is one of these, written at almost the same time as Dante Gabriel’s “paradisaal vision” in “The Blessed Damozel”. But the rich, sensual figurative nature of the latter contrasts greatly with the “Gothick nightmare” of the “hectic monologue”<sup>31</sup> of Christina Rossetti’s heroine. Its imagery, though marked with some signs of Pre-Raphaelite synaesthesia, appears ascetic and brings to mind the vanguard archaism of Dante Gabriel’s “Ecce Ancilla Domini” (1850) or the dream trance of “Beata Beatrix” (1864) rather than his gorgeously fleshly “Blessed Damozel”.

In his “Appreciations”, Walter Pater notes that “one of the peculiarities of ‘The Blessed Damozel’ was a definiteness of sensible imagery, which seemed almost grotesque to some, and was strange, above all, in a theme so profoundly visionary.”<sup>32</sup> Christina Rossetti’s paradise thus stops being as pictorially real as that in the poem by the agnostic Dante Gabriel. Christina’s heaven is beyond any description, due to it becoming both a more enigmatic (“visionary”) and a more gloomy place because of the separateness of the soul and the beloved. The sonnet contains no believer’s optimism: the day of the persona is gloomy, while only the beloved might bring the sunlight back, and that is impossible. But there is a faith that those forever absent are “alive”, giving rise to their warmth of “presence”. In the famous and widely cited “Song” (“Goblin Market”, 1848) – “*When I am dead, my dearest, / Sing no sad songs for me*”<sup>33</sup> – the 18-year-old Pre-Raphaelite poetess fills the picture of death with a gorgeous description of everything, the persona couldn’t see any more: roses and cypress trees, green grass and dew, a nightingale, rain, shadows. Grasping the mysticism of death via analogy on a “more shallow” level, the persona doesn’t believe in her “personal end”: “*I shall not hear the nightingale / Sing on as if in pain*!”. It seems that “as if in pain” defines not the tune of a bird’s song, but first and foremost states the young girl’s ambivalent feeling towards the idea of death. This can be treated as an aesthetic assumption and, as such, is arranged with a Pre-Raphaelite entourage.

Against the background of Rossetti’s Pre-Raphaelite narrative poems and early lyrics, the poetics in the late verse are notable for aniconia, with the Pre-Raphaelite imagery no longer required. If a trope is “a figure of reconsideration” (M. L. Gasparov), Rossetti had already reconsidered everything, having moved a long way in her poetics from Pre-Raphaelite aestheticism to Tractarian asceticism, from the outer to the inner, from depiction to contemplation, from analogy to reserve, and from feeling to faith. The poetics in “Later Life” reflect those of all Christina’s lyrics of faith. The “eyes of

30 McGann, Jerome J. *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985, pp. 143, 135.

31 Marsh J. *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography*. Lnd.: Pimlico, 1995, p. 213.

32 Pater W. *Appreciations*, with an Essay on Style, online: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4037/4037-h/4037-h.htm>

33 Rossetti, Christina: *The Complete Poems*. Lnd.: Penguin Books, 2001, pp. 52-53.

body" from her early poems ("The Goblin Market", "The Prince's Progress") give way to "eyes of soul" ("An Old-World Thicket", "Later Life"). This also determines the nature of mysticism in her poetry, "redirecting sensual desires and erotic passions to spiritual ends".<sup>34</sup> This reflects the transformation of seen, definite, materialistic sensuality via Analogy and Reserve into the spiritual and mystical. In this way, an evolution can be seen in the lyrical persona of Rossetti's poetry from the aesthetic to the teleological, and from the Pre-Raphaelite pictorial paradigm to Tractarian mysticism.

## Conclusions

The Victorian age and the Oxford Movement reveal the close connection of aesthetics and theology that is tightly related to the Romanticism of Scott, Coleridge and Wordsworth. Like the Pre-Raphaelites, the Tractarians asserted that the natural and supernatural formed a dialectic unity.

Poetry and religion – two cornerstones of Christina Rossetti's life – met both in her poetry and in Tractarian aesthetic theory. The influence of Tractarian theory on her poetry, previously rooted solely in biographical facts and the selection of topics, now appear in the basic elements of the common poetics of her verse and the "aesthetic religion" of the Tractarians.

It is precisely in the treatment of nature in Rossetti's verse where the correlation between Pre-Raphaelitism and Tractarianism becomes most evident – from narrative poems to lyrics, and from fantasy to devotional poems. In "An Old-World Thicket" ("A Pageant and Other Poems", 1881), the persona is showed to be moving from a Pre-Raphaelite to a Tractarian idea of nature, which is the poem's main message. The idea of showing "real things unseen" (Keble, Newman) is not only one of the most important "techniques" in Rossetti's poetics and incorporation of the Tractarian principles of Reserve and Analogy, but also a vivid example of the mutual penetration of Pre-Raphaelite naturalism and Tractarian incarnationalism. Christina Rossetti's aim to make the spiritual vivid and the phenomenal incarnate unites Pre-Raphaelitism and Tractarianism in her poetry.

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34 Harrison A. *Christina Rossetti in Context*. University of North Carolina Press, 1988, p.188.

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## „PATIRTI MEILĘ NE IŠKART, O PALENGVA“\*: CHRISTINOS ROSETTI LYRIKA IR OKSFORDO SĄJŪDIS

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**Santrauka.** Karalienės Viktorijos laikais Oksfordo sąjūdis parodė stiprų estetizmo ir teologijos ryšį, bei ryšį su W. Scotto, Coleridge'o, Wordswortho romantizmu. Sekdami Prerafaelitais, Traktarijai teigė, kad tikroviškumas ir netikroviškumas sudaro dialektinį vieni. Poezija ir religija, du kertiniai Christinos Rosetti gyvenimo ženklai, susieja tiek jos poezijoje, tiek Traktarijų „estetiškoje religijoje“. Vėlyvoje Christinos Rosetti eilėse Prerafaelitų ir Traktarijų poetika dera ne dėl alternatyvių, bet dėl viena kitą papildančių elementų įtvirtinančių Johno Henry Newmano idėjų, kad lyrika – tai „kontempliavimas“, ne „komunikacija“. Viena iš svarbiausių Christinos Rosetti poetikos „priemonių“ bei Traktarijų rezervo ir analogijos principų įkūnijimu, o ir Prerafaelitų natūralizmo ir Traktarijų inkarnacionalizmo raiškos gyvas pavyzdys yra siekis „regėti neregimus dalykus“.

Būtent gamtos aprašymuose sutinkamuose ir naratyviuose, ir lyriškose eilėse bei fantazijose ar devocionaliojoje poezijoje Christina Rosetti atskleidžia akivaizdų Prerafaelitų ir Traktarijų panašumą. Eilėraščiai aiškiai nurodo į vieno teksto rėmuose sutelktą Prerafaelitų ir Traktarijų diskursų interpretaciją. Ankstyvojoje poezijoje („Goblinų

mugė“ *The Gollin Market* ) “kūno akys“ transformuojasi į „sielos akis“ (*“Bilietas į senąjį pasaulį“ An Old World Thicket, “Vėlesnis gyvenimas“ Later Life*). Matome ir mistiškumo ištakas Rosetti poezijoje – regėtų, konkrečių, materialių juslinių patirčių transformaciją per analogiją ir rezervą į dvasišką ir mistinę išgyvenimą. Taip galime atsekti jos poezijos lyrinio asmens evoliuciją nuo estetiškojo prado į teologinį, nuo Prerafaelitų vaizdinės paradigmos į Traktarijų mistiškumą, nuo fenomenalumo į monumentalumą.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** Oksfordo sąjūdis, rezervo ir analogijos principai, Johnas Keble'as, Johnas Henrys Newmanas, Traktarijų estetinė teorija, Prerafaelitų sambūris, estetizmas, inkarnacionistai

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\* *“Chose love not in the shallows but the deep” eilutė iš Christinos Rosetti soneto “Cardinal Newman”*